

Matthew 10:5-8

Introduction

We saw in our last study that the age of the kingdom is the age of the harvest – which implies that this was *not* the case in previous ages. Yes, God has always had His people throughout the whole history of the world, but it was only in the age of the kingdom that the harvest would begin in earnest – that the barns would begin to be filled. *We* live in the age of the kingdom – which means that in every generation until the coming of Christ, there is a vast harvest of people waiting to be gathered in. This was not the case in the Old Testament. But it is the case today! And so we see that we are living in the last days. We are living in the eschatological age of the harvest. *Therefore...* In light of the fact that the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few, Jesus commands us to pray *earnestly* to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. We can pray like this when, like Jesus, we are moved with compassion because we see that the sinful and idolatrous people around us are like sheep without a shepherd, mangled and thrown to the ground. But Jesus doesn't just call us to *pray* for more laborers, He actually *sends us out* to labor in the kingdom harvest.

When Jesus sent out the twelve, it was a picture of sending out the entire church, because the church is built upon the foundation of these twelve apostles. It was into the church, as the true and recreated Israel, that the Jewish people were to be gathered. So as Matthew writes down Jesus' instructions to the twelve apostles, he sees that these instructions also apply to the whole church. As one commentator points out, Matthew was obviously “more interested in the instructions Jesus gave the preachers than in the actual trip, for he mentions neither that they departed, nor where they went, nor when they returned” (Morris)! Here again, we see that Matthew clearly thought it was important for his church to hear and understand these instructions. As Matthew records these instructions for his church of Jewish Christians, he wants them to be better motivated and better equipped to go out and labor in the harvest. May God accomplish this work also in us!

Verses 5-6 – These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

The first thing I want to point out is that while Mark and Luke both tell this same story about the sending out of the twelve, neither one of them mention the instructions in these two verses. Verses 5-6 of Matthew ten are completely absent in Mark and in Luke. *Why* is this? *Why* does Matthew *include* these verses? Well, we could easily answer that Matthew includes these verses because he is writing to Jewish Christians. But then we still have to ask about Matthew's purpose, and goal, and agenda. Matthew didn't include these verses just because he thought they would be “interesting” to his Jewish readers. So what is Matthew driving at? What, for Matthew, is the special significance of these two verses? Let's keep this question in the forefront of our minds as we move along in our study.

We saw in our last study that God's compassion is what motivates and compels His action. Here we see the additional truth that God's compassion always leads Him to act according to His sovereign purposes. Of course, it might not have been as “offensive” to us if Jesus had simply

said: “Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” After all, why should we be offended when Jesus says something compassionate? But as Gentile readers, we may still experience a little bit of uneasiness even if this was all Jesus had said. So the twelve are sent out to the lost sheep of the house of Israel... but where do the Gentiles fit in this evangelistic mission? Here’s what Jesus actually said: “Go *nowhere* among the Gentiles and enter *no* town of the Samaritans, but go *rather* to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” This is what we might call *particularistic*. Jesus explicitly forbids his disciples to minister among the Gentiles, or even to enter a town of the Samaritans. They might be in a Jewish city that borders directly on a Gentile village, but they were not to cross that border! They were to carefully avoid any (lit.) “way of the Gentiles”. They must go *only* to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Jesus will say to a Canaanite woman: “I was sent *only* to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24). But exactly *what* is it that Jesus is withholding from the Gentiles and Samaritans? What is it that He is granting exclusively to the lost sheep of the house of Israel? Maybe it’s really not that big of a deal.

Verses 7-8 – “And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons.”

Jesus withheld from the Gentiles and Samaritans and sent exclusively to the Jews the good news of the kingdom and the message of the salvation that had arrived in the Messiah. Jesus sent the disciples out to call only the Jews (and not the Gentiles and Samaritans) to repentance so that they might escape from the wrath to come (Matthew 3:1-12; 4:17). This is a big deal! So how does this very “particularistic” mission (this mission to Jews, but *not* to Gentiles or Samaritans) fit with the compassion of Jesus? Well once again, we have to see that God’s compassions always lead Him to act according to His just and holy and sovereign purposes – according to the *good* pleasure of His will.

So then, why Israel, and not the Gentiles and Samaritans? In one sense, this will always be an unfathomable mystery. When Paul thought about this very thing, he could only exclaim: “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” (Romans 11:33) But we can know this – that ever since *Abraham* (over 2000 years before Jesus), it was the Jews who had been entrusted with the oracles of God, not the Gentiles (Rom. 3:2). Since the days of Abraham, and then Moses, the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises belonged not to the Gentiles but to the Israelites (Rom. 9:4). God came down on the mountain and took to Himself as His special people, not the nation of Moab, or Edom, or Ammon, but the nation of Israel. And to this people, God entrusted His promises and His laws that through Gospel faith and obedience, they might be saved by His grace and have everlasting life (cf. Psalm 119; Rom. 4:6-8). Calvin writes: “If any one imagine that this prohibition is unkind, because Christ does not admit the Gentiles to the enjoyment of the gospel, let him contend with God, who, to the exclusion of the rest of the world, established with the seed of Abraham alone his covenant, on which the command of Christ [to go only to the Jews] is founded.” Now Israel was supposed to shine gospel light and blessing to the surrounding nations, but they themselves rejected the light, and so they obviously failed in this calling. But we have to remember that Israel’s failure to bring light to the nations (which was God’s command) did not mean the failure of God’s purposes. For God could just as easily have come down on a mountain in Moab and given his Gospel promises and laws directly to Moab. And He could have done the same thing with Edom, and Ammon, and Philistia. But He did not.

- ✓ Deuteronomy 4:32-35 – Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live? Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? *To you* it was shown, that *you* might know that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him.
- ✓ Psalms 147:12, 19-20 – Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion! He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and rules to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his rules. Praise the LORD!

And so Paul actually urges us to remember that as Gentiles, we were at one time (according to God’s sovereign and just purposes) separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world (Eph. 2:12). The Jews were near, but we were far off, the Jews were “sons of the kingdom” (Mat. 8:12), but we were strangers and aliens (Eph. 2:17-18). The Jews had received the special revelation of God and His marvelous salvation, but we had not, and indeed, throughout many centuries of history most Gentiles never heard.

So what’s the big deal? Well, the Bible teaches that apart from this *special* revelation from God, there can’t be any salvation. Paul says: “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?” (Rom. 10:14-15) Paul’s point is that in every place where God has not yet sent His messengers to proclaim the Gospel, there can obviously be no possibility of salvation. As the Baptist Confession states: “The Holy Scripture is the *only* sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience. Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are *not sufficient* to give that knowledge of God and His will which is necessary unto salvation.” Paul concludes that “*all* who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law (without ever having heard or known that *special* revelation of God, which is absolutely necessary for salvation; Rom. 2:12).

Conclusion

In these first four verses of Jesus’ instructions to the disciples before He sends them out to labor in the harvest, we learn that God’s compassions always leads Him to act according to His just and holy and sovereign purposes. When Jesus sends the disciples out to proclaim the message of the salvation that had arrived in the Messiah and to call people to repentance, He instructed them not to go in any way of the Gentiles, and to avoid every village of the Samaritans. Jesus instructed His disciples to bring the message of salvation *only* to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. By the time we come to the end of the book of Matthew, we will find that we have come to a new stage in God’s salvation plans and purposes, for then Jesus will say to His disciples: “Go therefore and make disciples of *all nations*” (Mat. 28:19).

- ✓ Acts 17:30 – The *times of ignorance* God overlooked, but *now* he commands all people everywhere [Jews and Gentiles alike] to repent.

Paul is reflecting on this very sovereignty of God in salvation when he writes:

- ✓ Romans 11:30-36 – For just as you [Gentiles] were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their [the Jews'] disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For **God has consigned** all [both Jews and Gentiles] to disobedience [at different times], that he may have mercy on all [both Jews and Gentiles].

And we see from the Scriptures and from history that one of the ways God has consigned some to disobedience is by withholding from them the revelation of His Gospel salvation. But we must remember here that the withholding of the Gospel proclamation did not mean the complete withholding of *all* God's love and kindness and grace.

- ✓ Acts 14:16-17 (cf. Mat. 5:44) – In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.”

Now even in these days of mission to all the nations, God is still sovereign over the proclamation and spread of His glorious Gospel.

- ✓ Acts 16:6-10 (cf. 18:9-11) – They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been **forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia**. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but *the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them*. So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

And lest we think that God strategically sends out His messengers only as a response to the faith that He can already see in people's hearts, we listen now to the words of Jesus:

- ✓ Matthew 11:21, 23 – Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For **if** the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they **would have** repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes... And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For **if** the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it **would have** remained until this day.

And yet in spite of what “*would have*” happened, God chose *not* to send the message of His salvation to Sodom, or to Tyre and Sidon. Now we'll come to this text later, and when we do, we'll see that there was not one person in Sodom who wished for salvation, but was denied. For now, it's enough for us to see that it was God's sovereign will to manifest His righteous wrath and judgment upon wicked Sodom (cf. Rom. 9:17, 22), and in keeping with this will He chose to withhold from Sodom the proclamation of His glorious salvation. So then, as we go out and labor earnestly in the harvest, what is the meaning and practical significance of this “particularism” in God's salvation plan – this sending of the Gospel message to some, but not (yet?) to others? There are some at this point who will contend with God and insist that either there is no

“particularism” in God’s salvation plan *or* there is no real need for us to go out and freely and earnestly offer the Gospel to the nations. But notice how we worded the question: *As we go out* and earnestly proclaim the gospel to the nations, what is the meaning and practical significance of this “particularism” in God’s salvation plan? *As we go out!* Jesus gives these very particularistic instructions to His disciples *as He is sending them out!* So what was the significance of these instructions for the *evangelistic* efforts of the disciples?

First of all, we can be assured that in whatever part of the harvest we find ourselves, it is *not* by accident. God is sovereign in where He has placed us (neighborhood, work, school, etc.). And this knowledge should cause us to contentedly and joyfully and *earnestly* labor in the harvest. God has placed us where we are in accordance with His sovereign purposes for the evangelization of the nations! This certainly must have given the disciples great confidence and excitement and joy as they went throughout the cities of Israel. And what about us? The knowledge that God has put *us* where we are in direct accordance with His sovereign purposes for the evangelization of the nations should obviously give us *great* confidence and excitement and joy as we proclaim the gospel to the harassed and helpless sheep that are all around us.

We asked: What was the meaning and significance of these “particularistic” instructions for the evangelistic efforts of the disciples? Remember now that Matthew (writing to Jewish Christians) is the *only* one who chose to *include* these instructions (Mark and Luke, writing to Gentiles, left them out). In connection with this, we remember that Matthew was one of the very ones that Jesus sent out in that *first* evangelistic mission. And so as Matthew went out proclaiming the message of salvation in the cities and villages of Israel, I can imagine him earnestly entreating the people with words like these: “It is to *you*, O Israel—*not* to the Gentiles and *not* to the Samaritans, but to *you*—that this message of salvation has come! The Messiah has sent us to *you*, and *not* to anyone else! Will you not respond to this goodness and kindness of God with true repentance and faith?” So also, in our own evangelism, we are *right* to proclaim that the goodness and mercy of God has come in a special way to *all* those who hear our message. God is not obligated to send the message of salvation to any one person or group of people in any particular generation, and no one on earth is entitled to hear the Gospel. To hear the Gospel is *not* the inalienable right of *any* man, woman, or child living on this earth (Rom. 2:12). So when God brings the message of the Gospel to people through us, we can know that His goodness and kindness have been shown to these people in an amazing way! **And knowing this, we can then show people that this very kindness is meant to lead them to repentance (Rom. 2:4).**

God graciously gave me the opportunity recently to share the Gospel with two individuals. One of them told me how she had grown up Roman Catholic, but then began to have questions about her faith. After all, what if she had grown up in a Muslim family? Well then she would probably be a Muslim. Or what if she had grown up in a Buddhist family? Then she would probably be a Buddhist. And if she was never taught the Roman Catholic faith, then at the very least she would never have been Roman Catholic! So she has to conclude one of two things: Either there is salvation in all religions equally, or if there is only one true “religion” then everything is left to the random chance of who happens to be born in the right family, or who happens to live in the right place at the right time. Or is there a third option? Yes, there is *indeed!* And this is the “option” that we want people to see as we proclaim to them the Gospel – which is the *power* of God unto salvation to *everyone* who believes! *Far* from being a reason to conclude that there is saving truth in all religions or that the salvation of souls is left to chance, the fact that a person is

hearing the Gospel while many others never will is in itself an amazing expression of God's sovereign kindness, and a powerful and compelling reason to repent and believe! In fact, I discovered that I was the second person in a brief period of time to share the gospel with this woman. And so I took this as a wonderful opportunity to try and help her see the undeserved kindness and goodness of God in that she had *twice* heard the Gospel while there are many others throughout the world (including right here in America) who will never hear the Gospel, and who must therefore perish forever in their sins (cf. Ezek. 33:6-8)! Can you see and hear and feel the compelling appeal and the sincere earnestness that this brings to our message? I can say to the unsaved person: The very fact that I am here and speaking this word to you is an expression of the completely undeserved kindness and goodness of God! Will you not respond to this amazing kindness and goodness with repentance? May the particularistic sovereignty of God over the proclamation and spread (administration) of His glorious Gospel message always fill us with boldness and confidence, and true compassion and earnestness as we seek to labor faithfully in His harvest!

But there is now one more practical lesson to be learned from all of this. We may *assume* that when Matthew first went out with the twelve, he proclaimed that Jesus had sent him *not* to the Gentiles and *not* to the Samaritans, but to the Jews alone. But we *know* that when Matthew wrote his Gospel for the Jewish Christians in his church, he made sure to remind them that the Gospel came *first of all to them*. Why did Matthew do this? That's the question we asked at the beginning of this message. Well in the event that Matthew would have any *unbelieving* Jewish readers, we've already seen the answer. But what about the Jewish Christians? What was Matthew driving at with them? I believe Matthew wanted the Jewish Christians to see that in light of their special place in God's gracious and sovereign plan, they now had the high privilege and responsibility of proclaiming and spreading this Gospel to others. Now until I began reflecting on this truth, I had decided to leave the last part of verse eight for the next study. Verse 8a reads in the ESV: "You received without paying; give without pay" (cf. NRSV; TEV). Based on the Greek, this is a perfectly legitimate translation, but *now* I began to wonder if this really captured the true intent. Most translations agree with the NASB and the NIV: "**Freely** you received, **freely** give." This can still mean the exact same thing as the ESV ("You received without paying; give without pay"), but in verse ten, Jesus will say that the *laborer deserves* his food, which certainly seems to be a form of "pay". And then I saw something else. After verse eight, everything through verse fifteen is also included in Mark and Luke. But this statement about freely receiving and freely giving is the last thing that *only Matthew* includes. Why should Matthew include this while Mark and Luke leave it out? Here is what I believe Jesus was saying to the twelve: "You have been chosen according to my sovereign purposes and grace to be my closest disciples and to receive in the Gospel of all that is mine. Now then, since you have received so freely and generously and graciously and undeservedly, *give* in the same way." And now I can hear Matthew saying to his Jewish Christian readers: "Since the days of Abraham, you have been chosen according to God's sovereign purposes to be the unique recipients of His grace and salvation. When the Messiah came, the message of His salvation was sent *not* to the Gentiles, and *not* to the Samaritans, but *first of all* to you *alone*. Now then, since you have received so freely and generously and graciously and undeservedly, *give* in the same way – now to Jews *and* Gentiles alike (cf. Mat. 28:19)." If this is what Jesus was saying to His disciples, and what Matthew was saying to his readers, then what do you think God is saying to us by the Holy Spirit? According to God's gracious and sovereign purposes, *we* have heard the Gospel, while at the same time God has justly and righteously decreed that others will never hear. So then, *since*

we have received so freely and generously and graciously and undeservedly, we *must give* in the same way! We must proclaim and spread the Gospel *wherever* and *whenever* we can! We must pray earnestly for more laborers until, according to God's sovereign plan, *all* the nations have heard and the harvest is fully gathered in. *Freely* we received, *freely* let us give!

Teaching our Children

- Q. When Jesus sent His disciples out to preach the good news of salvation and call people to repentance, where did He tell them to go? Where did He tell them *not* to go?
- A. Jesus told the disciples to bring the message of kingdom salvation to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Jesus told the disciples *not* to go anywhere among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans.
- ✓ Talk with your children about God's sovereign right to bring His message of salvation to whomever He wills. Start by reviewing God's ways in the Old Testament. **See last paragraph on page 2 through the first full paragraph on page 3.**
- Q. Can anyone be saved without hearing the special message of God's salvation?
- A. No. See Romans 10:14-15 & Romans 2:12 (last paragraph before the conclusion; page 3).
- Q. Does God still show His love and kindness and goodness even to the nations where His Gospel does not come? How?
- A. YES! See Acts 14:16-17 on page 4.
- ✓ Sometimes it is God's will to show His *righteous* wrath and judgment against people's *sin* by not giving to those people the Gospel message of salvation (See Matthew 11:21, 23 on page 4. Also see Romans 9:17, 22)
- ✓ Help your children to see God's amazing love and kindness and goodness toward them in that He gave them a Christian home so that they could learn and know the message of salvation in Jesus.
- ✓ Help them to see that this wonderful kindness and goodness should always lead them to true repentance and faith (Look up and read Romans 2:4).
- Q. If God is in complete control of where He brings His Gospel message, how can this encourage us as we share the Gospel with others?
- A. We can know that wherever God puts us (country, neighborhood, work, school), it is because of His perfect plan for the spread of the Gospel. This should give us confidence, excitement, and joy!
- A. ~ If God chose to bring us the message of salvation (when so many others will never hear), then we should be so filled with gratefulness that we want to share the Gospel with others *whenever* and *wherever* we can!
- ~ We have received the Gospel freely and undeservedly. We must give in the same way!
- ~ We must pray for the Gospel message to go out until all the nations have heard – even as *we* have heard.